

# JANUARY MEETING

## 1st Talk

### Mr Rolls, Mr Royce and Mr Johnson

A talk by Christine Waterman reported by Terry Sutton

The early links of the famous Rolls-Royce Company with the Dover and Deal area have been highlighted as a result of research for this year's centenary celebrations of the first "there and back" aircraft flight of the English Channel.

The Honourable Charles Rolls flew from Swingate to France and back again to Swingate in June 1910.

Miss Christine Waterman, a Vice President of The Dover Society, is the District Council's Director of Housing, Tourism and Culture, and as such is responsible for local celebrations recalling Rolls' flight. Miss Waterman MBE, the speaker at our January meeting at St Mary's parish centre, has carried out detailed research into the life of Charles S. Rolls and his association with the Rolls-Royce Company. Her talk was entitled Mr Rolls, Mr Royce and Mr Johnson and their connections with White Cliffs Country. Mr Claude Johnson, a managing director of Rolls-Royce, lived at one stage at Kingsdown. Miss Waterman revealed that

Henry Royce at one time lived, with the help of his nurse, in Granville Road, St Margaret's Bay, while his engineers stayed at Sea Street at St Margaret's.

Further more it was at St Margaret's that the first Rolls-Royce aero engine, The Eagle, was designed. More than 4,000 were made. Rolls-Royce engines are now being used in the aircraft industry throughout the world.

There was one story, said Miss Waterman, that Royce was not interested in flight, only motor cars. He declined to make engines for aircraft until one day he was shown an airship battling against the wind to cross the Channel.

His companion asked Royce could he not make a better engine than that on



Henry Royce at Claude Johnson's house. Courtesy of Christine Waterman.

the airship. The challenge was too much and so Rolls-Royce aero engines were born.

The main subject of Miss Waterman's talk was on the life and times of Charles Rolls, the son of a wealthy Monmouthshire family. She traced his education, his degree in engineering, his great interest in speed-first on bicycles, tricycles, motor cars, balloons, and eventually flight.

It was possible, she said, that he was in Dover to await the first flight of the English Channel by Louis Bleriot, a year before his own epic crossing. While waiting and preparing for his flight at Swingate, Rolls stayed with the governor of the military prison then at Langdon Cliffs. It is likely that Rolls initially never intended to fly to France and back but once over France, where he dropped a letter of greetings to French aviators, he decided to turn round and head back to Dover where his ground crew were surprised by his return.

Miss Waterman told of Rolls' earlier visit to Dover, in 1899, when he and one of his cars took part in a car show at Crabble Athletic Ground and a race around the perimeter circuit. There was a car procession marshalled by Sir Henry Crundall.

Looking ahead to this summer's celebrations, to be held on 5th and 6th June, Miss Waterman said she hoped to organise a re-enactment of the Crabble event.

Talks were in progress to get up to 100 Rolls-Royce motor cars lined up on the sea front at Dover while the Rolls' memorial statue would be refurbished. It was not meant to be green, she said! There would also be an exhibition at Dover Museum.

Dover is not the only place celebrating Rolls. His home town of Monmouth will be recalling his birth, the Isle of Sheppey will be remembering the earliest days of flight in the UK while Bournemouth will be commemorating his death in an air show accident 40 days after his Channel flight.

Rolls, who held the second UK pilots' licence, was the first Briton to die in an air crash.

